

What Went Wrong in Ohio?
Forum on Ohio Voting Irregularities
Statement by Rep. Jerrold Nadler
Committee on the Judiciary
December 8, 2004

I think the Distinguished Ranking Member, and I want to commend him for his leadership on this very important issue.

The right to vote in a free election, and the right to have your vote counted, is an indispensable right. Without it, our democracy would not be possible. More than that, the public must have the confidence that the system is fair, and that the results of that process can win broad acceptance.

Unfortunately, recent elections, marked by the closeness of the results, have highlighted some serious problems. In a 50 – 49 nation, questions about qualified voters not being able to count, about valid votes not being counted, about equipment failing to function, or being unable to verify the results, threaten the stability as well as the fairness of our system of government.

The Constitution guarantees the right to a republican form of government, and I would remind my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that the framers had in mind “republican” with a small “r.”

We have an obligation to investigate the facts, get a clear understanding of what happened, and do everything we can to make sure that those problems are fixed. To stick our heads in the sand would be a real disservice to the nation

We must also act expeditiously. With just two short years until our next federal elections, Congress does not have much time to act, and the states will not have much time to implement, any changes that might be necessary. We do not have the luxury of time.

In response to widespread reports of voting irregularities, including faulty equipment, voter suppression tactics, and other problems, we have asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to undertake a systematic and comprehensive review of election irregularities throughout the nation. Also, the Election Assistance Commission will hold hearings on the 2004 electoral process.

This hearing is part of that fact-finding process. The Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee are determined to get the facts and to act on them.

The events in Ohio present a good starting point, and I look forward to the testimony today.

Since Election Day, thousands of Ohio citizens have reported difficulties and barriers in casting their vote. These reports include: long lines at polling places; electronic voting machines which malfunctioned; precincts reporting more voters than they had, or inexplicable numbers of votes cast; and disenfranchisement, particularly in high-population areas.

It doesn't inspire confidence when the official in charge of running elections in a key state also heads a presidential campaign. Ohio Secretary of State Blackwell's dual role called into question every election decision he made that favored Republicans, and there were many.

The integrity of our democracy is at stake. We need to give the American people the confidence that each and every vote will be properly counted and that the democratic electoral process is respected.

Continuing to improve our election procedures will aid the work of restoring the people's trust in our democratic process. What is at stake here is not just a single presidential election but the right of all Americans to vote and to have those votes counted in all future elections.

I very much look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel, and I thank them for their participation.